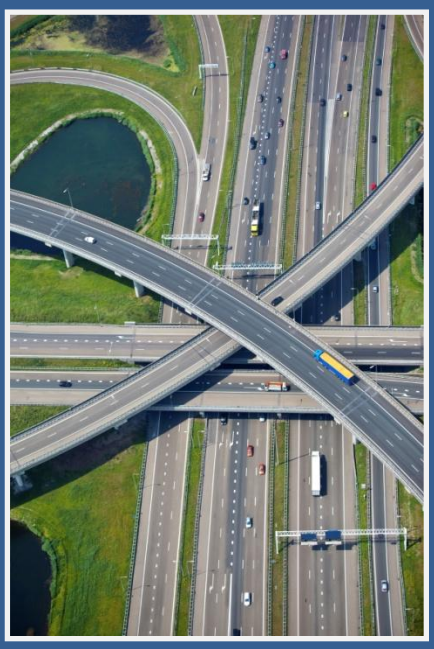
Building Roads to Success

Key Considerations for Communities and States Reconnecting Youth to Education



By Christina Weeter and Nancy Martin
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NATIONAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT COALITION

About the National Youth Employment Coalition

The National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) improves the effectiveness of organizations that seek to help youth become lifelong learners, productive workers, and productive citizens. Toward this end, NYEC:

- Tracks, crafts, and influences policy
- Sets and promotes quality standards
- Provides and supports professional development
- Builds the capacity of organizations and programs

Founded in 1979, NYEC's national network of members represents a broad range of organizations in the fields of workforce development, youth development, and education. The membership includes direct service providers, public agencies, associations with affiliate networks, research and policy groups, and technical assistance providers. NYEC also works with organizations in countries around the world.

The National Youth Employment Coalition is supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Marriott Foundation, fees for service, and membership dues.

For more information about NYEC, visit www.nyec.org.

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Select photos were taken by youth participants in Critical Exposure programs. Critical Exposure teaches youth how to use the power of photography and their own voices to become effective advocates for school reform and social change. Learn more at: www.criticalexposure.org.

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Introduction

To meet the demands of the 21st century economy and find a living-wage job, young people must graduate high school equipped with the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education or training. Unfortunately, the reality is that nearly one-third of our nation's youth do not even complete high school or its equivalent. Graduation rates in some communities are significantly lower; and across the country, students of color have little more than a 50% chance of earning a high school diploma.[1, 2] As of December 2010, 3.8 million (18.1%) of all 16- to 24-year-olds were unemployed; historically, unemployment rates are even higher for high school dropouts.[3,4] For example, in 2007 the rate of unemployment for 18- and 19-year-old high school graduates not enrolled in college was 25% compared to 45% of high school dropouts.[5]

Without an adequate education, many young people will lack the basic skills necessary to be competitive for even minimum-wage jobs. The average annual income in 2005 for a high school dropout was $17,299—that is $9,634 *less* than that of a high school graduate.[6] Research has shown each dropout costs the nation approximately $260,000 over his or her lifetime in lost tax revenues, reliance on public benefits, and/or incarceration, which translates to a cumulative loss to the nation of $3 trillion dollars when factoring in the estimated 13 million students who will drop out over the next ten years.[7] High dropout rates are a symptom of the current system of education failing many young people, especially in areas where poverty is highly concentrated. The dropout problem in the United States belies persistent social inequality, and working to fix it is a matter of social justice.

Building Roads to Success *is designed to assist community and state leaders, youth advocates, educators, and other stakeholders interested in improving or expanding the options for struggling students and out-of-school youth.*

Fortunately, states and communities are increasingly pursuing efforts to improve high schools, create multiple reengagement points for students who fall off track, and raise graduation rates. Many school districts are striving to provide more flexibility within the education system by offering a variety of secondary school options, all having high standards, but customized to meet the needs of a diverse population. Communities and states are working to be more strategic and innovative in their approach to increasing graduations rates by engaging community partners, making better use of data and funding, and streamlining policy to better meet the needs of today's young people. And while communities and states are in various stages of development in creating expanded education options, there is already a great deal of information about what works, and much can be learned from programs, policies, and initiatives currently in place.

Building Roads to Success: Key Considerations for Communities and States Reconnecting Youth to Education is designed to assist community and state leaders, youth advocates, educators, and other stakeholders interested in improving or expanding the options for struggling students and out-of-school youth. It is relevant to the work of municipal government, community-based organizations, school districts, postsecondary institutions, workforce development organizations, apprenticeship programs, and other youth-serving organizations. It is equally geared toward the work of governors' offices and state policymakers, departments of education, youth advocates, and workforce boards.

From 2008-2010 the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) convened teams of local and

state leaders for meetings focused on developing expertise and building capacity to reengage youth who are struggling in or have dropped out of high school and to connect them to education and career opportunities. The NYEC Learning Exchanges, supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, offered local and state leaders an opportunity to learn about exemplary policies, practices, and programs; participate in peer-to-peer exchanges with their counterparts in other cities and states; and engage in substantive policy discussions with national experts on the integration of secondary school reform, youth development, and workforce development. The content of *Building Roads to Success* has been informed in large part by the 18 communities and 15 states which participated in these Learning Exchanges, as well as NYEC's ongoing work on expanding education options.

Building Roads to Success identifies five key areas of programming, policy, and system building at the local and state levels that are crucial to the development of an environment in which all young people complete high school or its equivalent prepared for and connected to postsecondary opportunities: State and Local Policy, Cross-System Collaboration, Data Collection and Use, Building Capacity, and Funding. It provides background on each area to help local- and state-level stakeholders think about where to start, how to assess how their community or state is doing, and how to improve or expand upon work already under way. Each of these elements intersects with the others, ideally banding together to support a robust system of education options, particularly for struggling students and out-of-school youth. Throughout, there are examples of promising and successful programs, policies, initiatives, and citations for key resources to provide reference points. Examples are complemented by more in-depth resources that can be found on the NYEC website.[8]

Following the discussion of each of the key areas is a list of detailed questions for consideration to help guide local and state stakeholders, advocates, and decision makers in determining how the elements can be or are being implemented in their community. These questions are not exhaustive, but may be used as a checklist or as a point of departure for conversations about how to implement the five core elements identified in *Building Roads to Success* at a system-, community-, or state-wide level. It is not expected that conversations arising from these questions will occur once or in isolation, but that these and other questions will be revisited as needed and will be used to engage a variety of stakeholders in discussions of how to make education systems work for all students.

While the challenges of decreasing the dropout rate and increasing young people's academic success are many and often formidable, innovative strategies and effective practices are being implemented across the country in ways that can inform and inspire the work still to be done. We hope this paper provides encouragement and information to communities and states as they rise to this important challenge to improve their efforts on behalf of disconnected youth.

State and Local Policy

Policies that promote the development of multiple education pathways are a critical component of a system that supports young people obtaining a secondary degree or credential. While most education policy is developed at the state level, its impact is perhaps most felt at the local level by those working to educate and graduate young people. Nonetheless, districts have the autonomy to develop their own policies and agendas and these can influence the state by demonstrating local success and encouraging replication throughout the state. Communities and states can draw on approaches taken by other communities and states as well as lessons learned by national groups that have distilled information from the field. Stakeholders should consider the key policy areas that follow as part of efforts to expand education options for struggling students and disconnected youth.[9]

Making dropout prevention and reengagement visible priorities in state, local, and district agendas

State and local leaders working to support youth in achieving academic success should endeavor to keep dropout prevention and reengagement among the priorities in superintendents', mayors', and governors' policy agendas. Some communities, like Providence, RI, have benefitted from having strong mayoral support for youth initiatives.[10] Other communities have seized opportunities during electoral races to get candidates to go on record about plans to decrease the proportion of students who fail to graduate from high school. This provides leverage to ensure the dropout issue gets proper attention and sufficient resources from elected officials.

In preparing to engage and educate governors, mayors, and superintendents on the importance of dropout prevention and recovery, there are a number of considerations. Have they put forth a position or commented on this issue already? What are their interests and how can the dropout problem be related to those interests? Some elected officials may be motivated by financial or economic arguments more than by a belief in a moral imperative to support disconnected youth. Advocates can use labor market and other data sources to illustrate the economic benefits of reducing the numbers of out-of-school youth. Pennsylvania's Operation Restart employed this strategy as part of its efforts to engage gubernatorial candidates prior to the 2010 election.[11] Mississippi also established an "On the Bus" public awareness campaign to support the state Department of Education's dropout prevention program.[12] Cities such as Boston, Corpus Christi, Hartford, San Jose, and Seattle have also benefitted from strong and visible mayoral support for high school alternatives.[13]

Creating legislation to address dropout prevention and recovery

Ultimately, legislation is necessary to ensure long-term attention to supporting struggling students and reducing dropout rates. While many states recently have taken the approach of increasing the compulsory

school age, this alone is not enough to ensure students will remain in school until they earn a high school diploma. States can take a variety of less punitive approaches such as legislating the establishment of education funds targeting disconnected youth; creating a state office of dropout prevention and reengagement, such as those in Colorado and Mississippi; or establishing multi-agency P-20 Councils or a state dropout commission to study and make recommendations for state efforts to address the dropout crisis, as Massachusetts did in 2008.[14, 15] In 2008, the state of Washington passed legislation with provisions for expanded learning opportunities for students who are off track to graduate.[16] Illinois enacted the Hope and Opportunity Pathways through Education (HOPE) program to create a comprehensive system to reenroll significant numbers of dropouts in pathways leading to a high school diploma.

Supporting additional costs of serving struggling student and disconnected youth populations

In addition to enacting legislation that creates targeted initiatives to address dropout prevention and recovery, several states have established grant programs that bolster efforts. Colorado, Connecticut, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Texas have all allocated state funds for dropout prevention and recovery grant programs. Other states have developed funding mechanisms that provide additional support for students defined as disadvantaged or at risk of school failure or dropping out. Categorical funding and definitions for these subgroups of students can be complex and varied, but some states include supplements for students from single-parent or low-income families, and/or rural communities; students who are parenting, homeless, English language learners and/or former dropouts; and students who have other characteristics that qualify them as "disadvantaged" in some way. Wisconsin allows eligible districts to apply for supplemental state aid to support students in grades 5 to 12 who are at risk of not graduating from high school or are returning dropouts.

Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin have created funding mechanisms to provide additional support for students at risk of not graduating.

"Advocacy Day in Harrisburg" by Adam Levner, Executive Director, Critical Exposure.

Some states, including Indiana and Georgia, provide additional funding beyond standard per pupil allocations for students who attend alternative education programs.[17, 18]

Making graduation rates part of the accountability system

States have moved toward a greater emphasis on graduation rates as part of new accountability measures. This provides an opportunity for education leaders to highlight the role of multiple education pathways in increasing high school graduation rates. In fact, a growing number of states, including Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Vermont, and Washington have chosen to include five- and/or six-year cohort graduation rates in addition to the traditional four-year rates reported to the U.S. Department of Education as one way to recognize schools and districts for their efforts to keep off-track students engaged in school until they graduate.[19]

Addressing punitive policies (both toward youth and toward education entities)

Removing additional barriers that can have punitive effects on schools working to educate the hardest to serve youth encourages schools to address this population's needs. For example, if a state or district has a policy that prohibits an expelled student from

being served by another school or even another district, changes should be made to make it easier for a school or district that wants to engage hard-to-serve students. Other similar types of impediments should be removed to ensure schools or districts that want to serve at-risk students are able to do so.

Student academic growth as measured by high-stakes assessments is another area to be examined by stakeholders and policymakers. Many accountability systems are set up to unintentionally reward focusing on improving the performance of "bubble" students, that is, students on the cusp of reaching the threshold of meeting annual yearly progress as measured by a high stakes assessment and who require less support to get them to the desired level of performance. As a result, insufficient resources may be directed to helping students who are significantly behind academically make the needed learning gains in order to score at "proficient" levels for purposes of AYP under No Child Left Behind.

Districts and states should explore ways to eliminate this unintentional disincentive to support students most in need of academic assistance. One way of doing this is to reward schools and districts assisting students in making academic progress or "growth" over time. The policy issues related to implementing mechanisms that measure and reward student academic growth are multiple and can be complex, but it can be done. The U.S. Department of Education has issued non-regulatory guidance for states, local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools interested in implementing a state-level system to measure growth.[20] The Council of Chief State School Officers has created several guides to growth models that can be useful to policymakers, implementers, and other stakeholders who are considering how to measure student growth.[21] As of January 2009, fifteen states have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education to implement high-quality growth models including Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas.[22]

Another question to consider is whether students who leave school and subsequently enroll in a program to earn a GED should be considered dropouts. While schools should be discouraged from pushing students into GED programs as an "easy out," earning a GED is an important option to make available to students who have already dropped out and would not return to earn a diploma or to those students who might not be able to earn a diploma before "aging out" of the K-12 system. New York City's Access GED program was designed to educate students for whom a diploma may not be a viable option. By creating an academically rigorous learning environment that incorporates postsecondary planning for further education or training, the program is virtually indistinguishable from a diploma-granting school and can be a springboard to college, workforce training, and, ultimately, employment. In Camden, New Jersey, The Work Group operates the New Jersey Youth Corps of Camden County, a full-time program that combines academics leading to the GED with work experience for young people who have dropped out of school.[23] The majority of participants are ages 16 to 24 and have been out of school for at least two years, yet 85% of participants complete the program, 85-90% are placed in jobs or postsecondary education or training, and one-third earn a GED (twice the national GED pass rate). As these programs illustrate, if the end goal of a P-20 education system is students being prepared for meaningful participation in the workforce, then high-quality GED preparation programs that link to postsecondary options should be recognized as a success for accountability purposes.

Awarding credit based on competency

One way education systems can support off-track students in guiding them toward meeting graduation requirements is through policies that allow students to earn credit based on demonstrating competency or mastery of a content area. Education pathways that remove "seat time" requirements enable students to progress at their own pace toward the goal of graduation without compromising the rigor of the content requirements. Indiana is overhauling its alternative education policies to make changes that will remove needless barriers to serving students in non-traditional settings. For example, alternative education programs would no longer need to request a seat-time

Arizona, California, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island are a few of the states that award students credit based on demonstration of academic competency.

waiver for students to earn credit based on demonstrated competency. Stakeholders should examine whether there are existing mechanisms for awarding credit based on competency. If not, it is crucial to determine how students can demonstrate competency to earn credit. Arizona, California, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island are a few of the states that have these mechanisms in place.[24] For additional information on competency-based innovation at the school, district, and state levels, see Sturgis and Patrick's, *When Failure Is Not An Option: Designing Competency-Based Pathways for Next Generation Learning*.[25]

Ensuring flexibility to tailor services based on needs

Effective education options for struggling students and disconnected youth tailor services to the specific needs of the students served and can appear very different from traditional high school models. Students may work during typical school day hours and attend "twilight" schools later in the day. Some approaches may provide extended learning options or incorporate internship opportunities into the school day. Policies regarding online course options or "virtual learning" are another consideration that can be instrumental in educating students attending smaller schools or those in rural areas. Credit recovery for students who are off track to graduate is an option that may require a "seat time" waiver that allows students to earn credit by demonstrated competency. In 2009, the Indiana State Board of Education issued blanket waivers granting schools increased flexibility in a number of areas to help them focus on student-centered learning until new rules are created.[26] These waivers enable schools to award credit based on proficiency without regard to seat time and eliminate the requirement for a student to attend high school for seven semesters to earn a diploma. Boston Pilot Schools, part of the Boston Public Schools, are characterized by small, personalized environments with flexibility in budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, governance, and schedule, much like many charter schools.[27] Another (non-Pilot) high school within the Boston Public Schools system created a "sub-tenth grade" that enables students to repeat only the courses they failed, rather than the whole year. Students also wait a year to take the 10th grade MCAS exam, which is required to graduate, since they are not fully-fledged 10th grade students.

STATE AND LOCAL POLICY

As you work with stakeholders in your community and state to address policy issues, consider the following questions:

- ❒ Make dropout prevention and reengagement visible priorities in agendas of the governor, mayor(s), and superintendent(s)
  - Have they put forth a position or commented on this issue? What have they said about it?
  - What are their interests? How is the dropout problem related to those interests?
  - Has there been coverage in the press about how this issue affects the community that could be leveraged to gain attention by the current governor/mayor/superintendent or candidates?
  - If there is going to be a transition in leadership, is there an opportunity to engage incoming leaders in new ways regarding the importance of dropout prevention and reengagement and/or to help them build on existing efforts?

- ❒ Create legislation to address dropout prevention and recovery
  - Is there pending or approved legislation to address dropout prevention and recovery?
  - Who could be an ally to support such legislation?
  - How can we engage additional allies to support such legislation?
  - Do other states have legislative language that we could adapt and adopt?

- ❒ Support additional costs of serving struggling student and disconnected youth populations
  - What are the needs and real costs of meeting these needs?
  - Is there dedicated funding to address these needs?
  - What funding sources are potentially accessible?

- ❒ Make graduation rates part of accountability system
  - How does our state calculate the graduation rate?
  - Does our state allow or encourage reporting five- and six-year cohort graduation rates? If so, are districts aware of this? If not, who do we need to engage to incorporate five- and six-year graduation rate into the state's accountability system?
  - How might the state provide incentives to districts who continue working with students who take longer than four years to graduate?

- ❒ Address punitive policies (both toward students and toward schools)
  - What are the current disincentives to serving this population?
  - Who must be involved to change these punitive policies?
  - Does our state have an approved growth model?
  - What type of growth model should be implemented?
  - How should growth and progress be measured?
  - What capacity do schools/districts have to measure individual student growth?
  - How can individual student growth be rewarded?

- ❒ Award credit based on competency
  - Are there existing mechanisms in my school/district/state for doing this?
  - How can students demonstrate competency?
  - What models/methods are other states using?

- ❒ Ensuring flexibility to tailor services based on needs
  - What options are available that provide needed flexibility for students?
  - What are some ways that we can increase flexibility for students and for districts?

Cross-System Collaboration

Common sense tells us good schools are necessary for student success, but more is needed to ensure disadvantaged and disconnected youth graduate from high school ready for postsecondary success. Young people drop out of school for a variety of reasons, including reasons unrelated to school.[28] To address this, school districts, other youth-serving government agencies, community colleges, and a broad range of community-based organizations can work to build solid collaborations in order to prevent students from dropping out and to successfully reengage students who have already dropped out. Schools and districts can reach out to community-based organizations (CBOs), public agencies, and even some seemingly unlikely partners, such as museums, food banks, private industry, civic organizations, or arts organizations, to support youth in graduating from high school. Cross-system collaboration across youth-serving systems can help make the most of limited resources—space, funding, staff, etc.— and help ensure youth service and information gaps are filled, creating a more cohesive system of care for young people.

Identifying partners and defining common goals

Pressing community issues, whether a lagging economy or desire for increased public safety and community well-being, can provide opportunities for multiple sectors to join forces in addressing those issues, acknowledging that improved education outcomes for all young people are connected to many of them. Once there is a clear picture of the magnitude and character of the dropout crisis, the first step in building collaboration is identifying which agencies are already working to address it and which others might be interested in joining them. Municipal government, CBOs, health centers, postsecondary institutions, afterschool providers, youth councils, school boards, private business, workforce, foster care, housing, juvenile justice, law enforcement, and transportation systems are all potential entities that can be engaged to meet the needs of struggling students and disconnected youth in ways that schools cannot alone. The key is to be strategic in bringing the right partners to the table to meet specific needs of off-track youth.

Once allies are identified and committed to working collaboratively, partners must agree on a mission and core values that are understood and clearly communicated by all; define common goals; agree on targets or indicators of success; and create a plan for modifications if efforts are not producing the desired outcomes. For example, dual enrollment and early college models require collaboration between a district school and a postsecondary institution to help students meet high school graduation requirements while promoting a college-going culture by allowing students to earn postsecondary credits and attend classes on a college campus. Gateway to College is one such dual credit model that operates in 16 states and partners with a community, technical, or four-year college to reconnect high school dropouts to education—enabling students to simultaneously complete high school diploma requirements while earning an average of 41 college credits.[29]

National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families has developed an action kit for reengaging disconnected youth with examples of how Albany, NY; Baltimore, MD; Brockton, MA;

Gateway to College is a dual credit model involving a partnership between a school district and a community, technical, or four-year college to reconnect high school dropouts to education—enabling students to simultaneously complete high school diploma requirements while earning an average of 41 college credits.

Cheyenne, WY; Corpus Christi, TX; and Guadalupe, AZ, have all created local collaborations to reengage young people in school, work, and supportive settings.[30]

Creating programs and partnerships across youth-serving agencies and organizations

Collaborative efforts can range from a single school partnering with a single CBO to a statewide, cross-system entity encompassing multiple state offices. Likewise, the level of collaboration can range in the extent to which there is sharing of information between agencies about students who are falling off track to graduate, coordination of activities that support youth, sharing of resources, and mutual capacity-building.[31] Schools or districts may create agreements to share information about students who have dropped out with outside agencies that provide outreach and reengagement efforts or services to specific sub-groups of students who are off track to graduate. For example, Boston's Ostiguy High School is a specialized, CBO-run alternative school for young people in recovery from substance abuse that operates as a partnership between Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), Cushing House residential treatment center, and Boston Public Schools.[32] By contrast, a governor or legislative body may authorize a Dropout Task Force that includes representatives from the state departments of education, workforce, health, child and family services, etc., and appropriates funds to support cross-system efforts to address the dropout crisis. In any of these scenarios, roles and responsibilities for each agency must be clearly defined to make the collaboration work well.

Communities in Schools' (CIS) Performance Learning Centers (PLC) are a model of school-CBO collaboration that provides education in small, non-traditional high school settings for students at risk of dropping out.[33] Originally developed in Georgia, these schools now operate in six states with a seventh state expected to open a PLC in early 2011. The model requires partnership between a local school district and local and state CIS affiliates. The district provides classroom and administrative space, principals, and teachers, while the CIS provides an on-site service coordinator to address the nonacademic issues a student may be struggling with. Eighty-seven percent of PLC students improve their academic average while in the program, on average increasing academic subject average grades from 70.7% to 82.3%.[34]

New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) has a citywide menu of options based on a similar model of partnership between the district and CBOs that serve overage and undercredited high school students.[35] Options include Transfer High Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers, as well as full- and part-time GED programs, all of which offer small, personalized learning environments. These specialized programs are able to graduate a much higher proportion of overage, undercredited students than New York City's comprehensive high schools. Transfer schools and YABCs have a 6-year graduation rate of 55% and 50% respectively for their overage, undercredited student populations, compared to 6-year graduation rates of 15% and 30% respectively for comparable student populations in traditional comprehensive high schools. Most of the OMPG programs are complemented by a Learning to Work (LTW) component, operated by a CBO partner, and provide opportunities for intensive employability skills development workshops, subsidized internships, college and career counseling, and job placement. Operating inpartnership with approximately 50 schools within the OMPG portfolio, the LTW program also includes academic tutoring, attendance outreach, youth development supports, and individual and group counseling to ensure students are not "falling through the cracks." In the 2008-09 school year, CBOs provided more than 10,000 students these services, as well as college and career counseling and work readiness services.[36]

As part of its 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act, Kentucky established Family Resource and Youth Services Centers throughout the state (serving students through age 12 and older than 12, respectively)

administered by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.[37] These school-based centers, strengthened by community partnerships, are designed to help students at risk of school failure by addressing non-cognitive barriers to school success. Youth Service Centers coordinate referrals to health and social services, career exploration and development, summer and part-time job development, substance abuse education and counseling, and family crisis and mental health counseling.

The Association for High School Innovation (AHSI) is a network of youth development organizations with over 290 sites nationwide committed to creating educational opportunities for young people for whom traditional school settings have not been successful. Through its Place-Based Partnerships in Indianapolis, IN; Nashville, TN; and Newark, NJ, AHSI is engaging with community-wide partners, municipal leaders, higher education institutions, school districts, State Education Agencies, and others, to develop a wide range of high quality pathways to graduation in those three communities and demonstrate the potential of such community-wide strategies.[38]

Creating collaborative initiatives, task forces, or councils (local or statewide)

Disadvantaged youth may be engaged with a variety of youth serving entities, which makes it is essential for those entities to collaborate to address the pressing issues disconnected youth confront. The creation of collaborative initiatives can result in individual systems changing the ways in which they operate and becoming more effective in their work with other agencies.[39] This can lead to greater efficiency in use of resources as well as an outcome that is "greater than the sum of its parts." Effective collaboration can be facilitated at both the state and local level and includes partners who are committed to working together to achieve common goals.

In response to a community coalition's advocacy, in 2008 Massachusetts passed the *Act to Improve Dropout Prevention and Reporting of Graduation Rates* which created a Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission, comprised of legislators and cross-sector representatives from education, workforce development, health and human service agencies, and community organizations.[40] The Commission was charged with surveying best practices and programs throughout the nation, identifying existing promising practices within Massachusetts, and making recommendations on specific areas that relate to the goal of reducing the dropout rate by 50% over five years.[41]

In 2006, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, recognizing a need for better coordination, alignment, and continuity of services for the city's youth and better data- and information-sharing among systems, created the Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force in partnership with the San Francisco Youth Commission to develop recommendations for improving outcomes for youth ages 16 to 24 who were disconnected from education, employment, and social support systems.[42] This led to the creation of the Transitional Age Youth Initiative (TAYSF), an interagency planning group that works closely with government agencies, nonprofit providers, and the local community to align resources and efforts to support youth in improved education, employment, and quality of life outcomes.[43] As a

Massachusetts' Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission, created in response to a community coalition's advocacy, included representatives from education, workforce development, health and human service agencies, and community organizations. The Commission was tasked with surveying best practices and making specific recommendations to reduce the dropout rate.

result, TAYSF is currently examining what other cities have done to meet the needs of their disconnected youth and is considering how those strategies might be implemented in San Francisco.

Identifying or creating a coordinating entity

In the process of developing innovative, multi-partner collaborations, youth serving systems need a coordinating entity able to broker and manage relationships, develop funding streams, and convene collaborating partners. Intermediary organizations—organizations that serve as conveners and offer services to core education and community partners—can serve to connect schools, community-based organizations, government agencies, and other youth-serving organizations to expand education options and improve outcomes for youth. Intermediaries are able to work across a community, navigating multiple youth-serving organizations and agencies, to elevate the importance of disconnected-youth issues and ensure youth success. Intermediaries are able to gather public and private support for the funding and policies required to create a system of multiple options for youth.

A lead agency responsible for coordinating efforts among collaborating partners can keep plans to reengage disconnected youth moving forward, ensuring that memoranda of understanding and/or contracts are put into place where appropriate; there is a common point of entry, intake, assessment, and referrals to streamline the process of reconnecting youth; an advisory committee is comprised of representatives from all partners; there are regular meetings to review progress, share best practices, maintain communication among partners, and provide mutual support to ensure continued focus on student success; and there is a level of accountability for tasks related to the collaborative's work or action plan.

The lead agency may be a government office, such as the state or district department of education or a municipal agency; but depending on the local environment, it can sometimes make more sense to have a lead convener perceived as "neutral" by partnering agencies, such as a CBO that acts as an intermediary. What is important is that the lead entity has a level of trust and credibility with all the partners, the ability to bring together and leverage resources to support the collaborative's goals, leadership expertise

that supports collective input and decision making, and the capacity and willingness to pursue systems and policy change.[44] In Baltimore, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development is the lead agency promoting cross-system collaborations with the Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore City Community College, and the city's Health and Parks and Recreation Departments for multiple efforts to serve in-school and out-of-school youth.[45] In Philadelphia, the local youth education and workforce development intermediary, Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), acts as convener. PYN assumes several roles, including leading the city's workforce development system; staffs and supports the Youth Council and its subcommittees; and oversees several other youth workforce initiatives. PYN is also the managing partner for the city's dropout reduction initiative Project U-Turn—a collaborative of over 50 organizations including the school district, the city Department of Human Services, and Public Citizens for Children and Youth.

Sharing data across sectors

Shared data among members of the partnership can be used to achieve higher-level goals of cross-system collaboration. For example, the types of data collected can be used strategically to drive policy goals related to

disconnected youth.[46] When data that shines a spotlight on the magnitude and community impact of the dropout crisis is presented with solutions for how to address it, a sense of urgency and capacity to tackle the problem can be created. To be effective, the data and its implications must be presented in a way that is easy to understand and resonates with particular audiences. For example, if the data show that a substantial number of jobs cannot be filled with local talent because there are not enough young people graduating with the skills needed to fill those jobs, sharing this information with business owners and local industry can help them become champions for investments in efforts to graduate more young people with the skills needed. Additionally, sharing real-time data among partners about young people who are on the verge of dropping out makes it easier to implement interventions quickly. As cross-system collaboration grows stronger and increases its capacity to help young people achieve desired outcomes, interim measures of success should be highlighted to maintain the momentum of the effort and demonstrate the investment is paying off.

CROSS-SYSTEM COLLABORATION

As you work with stakeholders in your community and state to address issues of cross-system collaboration, consider the following questions:

- ❒ Identify partners and define common goals
  - Who should we develop partnerships with?
  - Do we have the right people at the table? Any gaps in representation?
  - Is there a common mission and vision?
  - What goals can partners agree on?
  - Can all partners convey the mission, vision, and goals to others?
  - What are the agreed upon targets or indicators of success?
  - What is the plan for modifications if efforts are not producing the desired outcomes?

- ❒ Create programs and partnerships across youth-serving agencies and organizations
  - Are there existing partnerships between school/district/department of education and other entities?
  - Who is doing what? How do we make it systemic?
  - Who needs to be involved to make the partnership happen?
  - Are there sub-populations of disconnected youth (e.g. youth who are parents, working, in substance abuse recovery) that need specialized supports that a partnership would provide?

- ❒ Create collaborative initiatives, task forces, or councils (local or statewide)
  - Are there any collaborative initiatives, task forces, or local/state councils existing or in the works?
  - Who can or should authorize a task force/council?
  - Which agencies should be involved?

- ❒ Identify or create a coordinating entity
  - Who should take the lead as the coordinating entity or intermediary?
  - Is there an advisory committee comprised of representatives from all partners?
  - Are there regular meetings to review progress, share best practices, maintain communication among partners, and provide mutual support to ensure continued focus on student success?

- ❒ Share data across sectors
  - How can this data be communicated to compel action?
  - What are the indicators that the initiative is working?
  - How should the data be conveyed to gain additional champions for the effort?

Data Collection and Use

Use of data is increasingly important in decisions about policies, programming, and funding, particularly with the current emphasis on using rigorous evidence to inform federal funding decisions. Stakeholders who strive to increase the available education options for young people can make the case for increased investment in these options by using education data and relevant information about disconnected youth to communicate the need to decision makers and the public at large, and for targeting existing resources to young people who are most in need. At a time when "accountability" is one of the most frequently used terms in the discussion of education reform, it is important that measures be linked to data and information that are most useful in improving outcomes for youth. It is crucial to ensure data are accessible in real time to drive interventions that increase student graduation rates and shape policies that support effective dropout recovery and prevention efforts. The discussion of data collection and use that follows does not assume a narrow definition of data as simply numbers and statistics, but recognizes the plethora of information education stakeholders can draw upon to create a richer picture of student, school, and district needs; community assets; and what strategies or interventions are yielding positive outcomes for youth.

Documenting the character and magnitude of the crisis

Before designing interventions to address the dropout crisis, stakeholders need a clear sense of how many young people are dropping out of school and what characteristics these young people embody. Researchers have used data to identify specific schools around the country that are responsible for a disproportionate number of high school dropouts—2,000 "dropout factories" graduate less than 60% of their students.[47] The cities and states with high schools identified as dropout factories can use this information to target district- and school-level reforms to significantly increase graduation rates. U.S. Census data and labor market studies, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Center for Education Statistics are excellent sources of national and state level data. Organizations such as the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (publishers of *Education Week*), and the Education Trust have compiled a variety of reports detailing data for cities, states, and student sub-populations.

To combat the crisis, districts and communities must understand how many students are off track to graduate to determine their dropout prevention and recovery program needs. In addition, they can use what they learn about off-track students (e.g., Who are the students falling off track? When does this occur? What personal and/or academic factors are at play? What schools do they attend?). Robert Balfanz's research suggests four broad classes of dropouts: 1) students who drop out due to life events such as pregnancy, getting arrested, or needing to work to support family members, 2) "Fade Outs" who have become frustrated or no longer find meaning in attending school, 3) "Push Outs" who are students perceived as detrimental to the school in some way and are subtly or tacitly encouraged to leave school, and 4) students who have experienced persistent school failure and have fallen so far off track it seems hopeless to remain in school. By understanding which categories students fall into, he argues, communities can tailor programming to address those needs.[48] For example, credit recovery options can be created for

students who are significantly behind in credits. Likewise, if data show significant numbers of students are leaving school when they become parents, options could be designed to provide onsite childcare or partnerships with external organizations could be developed to help mitigate barriers related to attending school while parenting.

MDRC's research on promising strategies to reengage disconnected youth discusses the imperative for intervention strategies to be aligned with the characteristics of subpopulations of youth along the continuum of risk for disconnection.[49] This continuum, ranging from "least disconnected" to "most disconnected," includes:

- In-school youth at risk of dropping out or graduating without necessary skills,
- High school dropouts who are motivated to reconnect and are nearly college-ready,
- High school dropouts who are motivated to reconnect and are ready (or close to ready) for GED prep,
- High school dropouts who are motivated to reconnect but possess very low basic skills, and
- "Never connected" dropouts.

Their research further reveals that while there are a growing number of efforts to serve struggling high school students and higher-functioning dropouts who can be reenrolled in high school to earn a diploma or need relatively little preparation to pass the GED, there are few initiatives for dropouts with very low math and reading skills for whom GED attainment is not a likely outcome. Communities that are able to determine where their youth fall along this continuum are better positioned to provide appropriate options. New York City (NYC) is one example of a district that conducted a deeper analysis of the district's nearly 140,000 overage and undercredited youth and how it overlaps with the dropout population to create a differentiated portfolio of educational models aligned with a student's individual age and credit accumulation.[50] Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs) are evening programs designed for students age 21 and under who have been in school for at least four years and have attained a minimum of 17 credits. YABCs consist of a non-traditional block schedule designed to allow students to concentrate exclusively on the credit portfolio needed for graduation. Transfer High Schools serve primarily students age 16 to 17 who have earned fewer than 9th grade credits and have been enrolled in an NYC public school for at least one year but may have previously dropped out. Full- and part-time GED programs are also available for overage, undercredited youth. The Access GED model is a full-time GED program that incorporates a youth development approach with connections to postsecondary training and in-depth career exploration. Referral Centers are one-stop guidance centers located in each of New York's five boroughs to connect high school age youth to the academic option best suited for their needs as well as wrap-around supports.[51]

Using data to make the case for multiple education pathways

Data can also be used to generate public will, particularly by highlighting the extent of the dropout problem while simultaneously presenting solutions. For example, of the 140,000 overage and undercredited youth in 2006, New York City identified an estimated 70,000 who were still enrolled in school—if these students alone comprised a school district it would be the sixth largest in the nation. If the remaining out-of-school overage and undercredited population were added to this it would be larger than any other district except for Los Angeles, CA. Given the extent of the problem in New York City, Transfer Schools boast impressive results for overage, undercredited students who graduate at an average rate of 56% compared to 19% of overage, undercredited students who remain in comprehensive high schools.[52] YABCs have been successful at converting 44% of eligible students to graduates within one year of enrollment. These successes highlight the value of making multiple education models available to serve students that most likely would not have graduated if they had remained in a traditional comprehensive high school.

Stakeholders can use cost-benefit analyses to highlight the value of investment in helping a struggling student or returning dropout graduate from high school and go on to complete additional training or earn postsecondary credentials—that is, students who become wage earners contribute to the community by way of taxes paid and also require fewer public dollars spent on social services or incarceration than do those who never complete high school. Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children highlighted this community

benefit in its "Operation Restart" campaign to reengage dropouts, framing the issue as part of an economic growth strategy for the state. Promotional materials describe how the nearly 120,000 16- to 24-year old high school dropouts in Pennsylvania could contribute more than $1.1 billion each year in state revenue by obtaining a high school credential and some postsecondary education instead of costing $80 million through public programs. This cost-benefit comparison was used to create "talking points" about the scope of the problem and successful models to reengage dropouts that were disseminated through statewide networks and media outlets, drawing attention to the issue at both the local and state levels. Outreach and meetings with 2010 Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidates yielded both candidates identifying dropout recovery as important components in their plans for governing the state if elected.[53, 54]

Stakeholders can be creative in how they use information about disconnected youth to persuade policymakers and others to invest in opportunities that reengage students and put them on a pathway to graduation. For example, the nonprofit organization Critical Exposure has worked with youth in Baltimore, MD, Washington, DC, Austin, TX, Albuquerque, NM, and Philadelphia, PA, training them to harness the power of photography to shine a light on education inequities and advocate for school reform and social change.[55] Critical Exposure students in Baltimore, MD used photography to document school conditions and urge lawmakers to increase funding. Subsequently, the General Assembly increased the statewide school capital budget and nearly doubled funding for Baltimore City. While these efforts were a portion of a broader advocacy campaign, one state senator highlighted the role of the students' testimony and photography as a key influence in the decision to increase funding for public schools.

Pennsylvania's "Operation Restart" highlights high school dropout reengagement as an economic growth strategy for the state using a cost-benefit approach to garner support for a statewide agenda.

Identifying resources currently available

Identifying and documenting existing resources enables communities and states to make the most of what is already available. By identifying what resources exist, stakeholders can not only avoid duplication of services, but also work to ensure that areas of need are addressed and appropriate referrals are made to provide more comprehensive support to youth struggling to complete their secondary education. It is important to consider which federal, state, local, and private grant opportunities are available to support dropout reengagement and programming for struggling students. Stakeholders can also identify and document what kinds of schools or other educational institutions, community- and faith-based organizations, businesses, youth-serving organizations, philanthropic and community foundations, public agencies, health and recreation centers, and other organizations that can be engaged to meet the needs of disconnected youth. Since 2001, when San Francisco amended its city charter with what is known at The Children's Amendment, the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) has conducted a Community Needs Assessment, which is required every three years.[56] The Community Needs Assessment functions as a blueprint

San Francisco conducts a city-mandated Community Needs Assessment every three years using a variety of information sources. The results of the Assessment help determine funding allocations and identify specific parts of the city in need of additional social services.

for allocations from the city's Children's Fund, incorporates feedback from a wide range of community members and stakeholders, and includes information on key service areas and system-wide issues. The assessment process has helped identify specific areas of the city where there is a high need for social services.[57]

Community agencies can also drive efforts to identify resources for disconnected youth and share the information not only with other community-based organizations, but directly with youth themselves. Communities in Harmony Advocating for Learning and Kids, or CHALK, is a San Francisco project that provides a range of youth services with a specific focus on transformative youth development and employment. CHALK offers a variety of services as a part of its YouthLine project, including a searchable online database of youth services available in San Francisco and a toll-free information and support line run by youth.[58]

Ready by 21, an initiative of The Forum for Youth Investment, offers a number of tools to help stakeholders document the landscape of available youth services.[59] The process of mapping community youth resources can be even more powerful when youth are directly engaged in documenting the available resources and contributing to a data system that can be accessed by community stakeholders. Youthline America has created a mapping curriculum for in-school and out-of-school educators to guide young people through the mapping process.[60] As part of its Mapping America initiative, Youthline America aims to create a national database of youth opportunities.

Building cross-sector data-sharing systems

Efforts to address the needs of young people who are off track are bolstered by sharing data and information across youth-serving systems to provide a more seamless network of supports. Ideally, states create longitudinal data systems with common definitions and standards that include preschool through postsecondary education and workforce systems, but also have linkages to other critical agencies, such as social services, health, and juvenile/criminal justice systems. With a well-developed data system it can be possible eventually for states to connect school performance to spending and employment. The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) has identified 10 essential elements of highly effective state longitudinal data systems and 10 state actions to ensure effective data use by all stakeholders within the broader education system to improve student performance.[61] DQC highlights the need to consider fundamental concepts in the construction of longitudinal data systems such as privacy protection, data architecture (how data are coded, stored, managed, and used), data warehousing, interoperability, portability, professional development around processes and use, and researcher access.[62] In addition, states that have data systems that incorporate all 10 of DQC's Essential Elements are able to answer the following key policy questions:

- Which schools produce the strongest academic growth for their students?
- Which middle school achievement levels indicate that a student is on track to succeed in rigorous courses in high school?
- Does the state have the necessary elements to calculate a longitudinal graduation rate, according to the calculation agreed to in the 2005 National Governors Association compact?
- What high school performance indicators (e.g. enrollment in rigorous courses or performance on state tests) are the best predictors of students' success in college or the workplace?
- What percentage of high school graduates requires remedial education in college?
- Which teacher preparation programs produce graduates whose students have the strongest academic growth?[63]

Communities and states should consider the capacity at both the state and district level to collect and analyze information about struggling students and disconnected youth. In some places, a district may have a more sophisticated system in place than the state and vice versa. It is also important for states to consider local conditions to decide whether it is better to create one data system for all state agencies, or coordinate existing data systems. A benefit of the latter approach is that it avoids the difficulty of a single data system trying to be responsive to the needs of a variety of agencies with differing goals. Maine's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), for example, enables state agencies—each of which collects different types of information and uses different individual identifier numbers—to link the identifiers through a centralized server enabling staff to share data across systems without necessarily having access to sensitive, individual data such as social security numbers.[64] Maine is taking this work a step further as part of the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC), through which Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont will work together to create data systems that will promote comparability of student achievement and educational outcomes across state lines.[65] The states of Connecticut, Florida, Maine, and Washington are creating cross-agency data-sharing systems to ensure that individual student data is connected across systems to improve student success.[66]

Some communities have been successful in developing systems that enable reciprocal data sharing between schools, community based organizations (CBOs), and local other youth-serving agencies. Boston, MA has mechanisms that allow for the district to share school data with its workforce agency, enabling it to provide resources for dropout reengagement through Project Reconnect.[67] In Louisville, KY, Jefferson County Public Schools and multiple community partners have developed a data warehouse that tracks youth participation in CBO-run programs and links it with student academic records to measure success on four outcomes: academic achievement, behaviors, dropouts and transitions, and school attendance.[68] The system gives the district and the CBOs a picture of program effectiveness. Through a partnership with the University of Louisville, this information is further enhanced by the Connectedness Analysis Reporting System that allows CBOs to develop reports that help CBO and district staff examine the efficacy of their strategy and provide funders with hard data providing evidence of effectiveness and program value. State-level cross-sector data systems can be especially useful because they enable stakeholders to follow a student who moves not just from school to school, but between districts and across various systems statewide as well.

"Self-Portrait" by Andre, 12th grade, Spingarn STAY, Washington, D.C.

Louisville, KY's data warehouse tracks youth participation in CBO-run programs and links it with student academic records to measure success on multiple outcomes, giving both the school district and CBOs a picture of program effectiveness. This information is further enhanced by the Connectedness Analysis Reporting System, which enables reports to be created that help CBO and district staff assess the efficacy of their strategy and provide funders with evidence of effectiveness and program value.

Philadelphia's Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS), housed at the University of Pennsylvania's Cartographic Modeling Laboratory, merges individual-level data on young people from the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) and the city's social service agencies, including the Department of Public Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Emergency Shelter and Services. The resulting de-identified data allow SDP and its partners to follow

cohorts of students over multiple years, examining their educational outcomes as well as the predictors of graduation and dropping out.[69]

Using early warning indicators to identify students at risk of dropping out

Accurate, real-time student data can be used to create an early warning system that identifies students who are at risk of falling off track so that interventions can be implemented to get them back on track to graduation. Examining patterns in attendance, academic performance (e.g. course failures or grade retention), discipline data, and student age compared to credits earned can indicate whether a student is falling off track to graduate and are more predictive of high school graduation than student background (e.g. achievement test scores, demographic information, etc.).[70] Inadequate credit accumulation in the freshman year has been demonstrated to be one of the best predictors of failing to graduate four years later.[71] Looking at this type of data can help schools target supports to off-track students before they become significantly behind in credit accumulation and possibly drop out. The Consortium on Chicago School Research has developed a definition of the freshman "on-track indicator," including credit accumulation sufficient to be promoted to 10th grade and having no more than one semester F, which has been adopted by the Chicago Public Schools as part of the accountability system.[72] Looking at this type of data can help schools target supports to this group of off-track students before they become significantly behind in credit accumulation and possibly drop out.

The National High School Center has developed a tool to assist schools and districts develop an early warning system that calculates the indicators for attendance, course failures, GPA, and on-track status and generates a report that shows which students are not meeting defined benchmarks for each of the indicators.[73] Once an early warning indicator system has been developed, school officials can target resources to students in need of intervention and districts can identify schools with high numbers of off-track students that may need more comprehensive dropout prevention efforts to meet student needs. Ideally, an early warning system is aligned with district and/or state longitudinal data systems to ensure effective analysis of all factors, including those emerging prior to 9th grade, that

"Self-Portrait at School" by Jericka, 6th grade, Kids on the Hill, Baltimore, MD.

contribute to students falling off track to graduate from high school and interventions that contribute to getting students back on track.

The state of Louisiana has implemented all 10 "essential elements" outlined by the Data Quality Campaign.[74] This has enabled them to create a Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) that they piloted in 2008. DEWS has four domains (discipline, attendance, GPA, age) that are "triggered" when a student exceeds a defined threshold.[75] Once a student is identified to be "at-risk," stakeholders are identified and notified of a meeting to plan appropriate interventions that are documented in the system. DEWS tracks and documents at-risk indicators, types of interventions, individual student data, and aggregate data at the student, school, district, and state levels.

DATA COLLECTION AND USE

As you work with stakeholders in your community and state to address issues of data collection and use, consider the following questions:

- ❒ Document the character and magnitude of the crisis
  - How many dropouts?
  - What are the indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out?
  - When are they dropping out?
  - What are other demographic characteristics of the students dropping out? What do we know about this student population? Can early indicators of academic failure be identified?
  - What is the economic impact on the community?

- ❒ Use data to communicate the need for supporting multiple education pathways
  - Who is the audience to address?
  - What kind of information would be find most useful and compelling?
  - How can we present this information in a "user-friendly" way?
  - How will we disseminate the information?
  - Are there high-profile allies we can engage to champion the issue?

- ❒ Identify and document resources currently available
  - What community resources exist?
  - How many high schools are in the community? Do they have different offerings at each?
  - Are there interventions that are proving to be effective with specific sub-populations of off-track students?
  - Is there a mechanism for documenting what community resources exists and making this information publicly available?

- ❒ Build cross-sector data-sharing systems
  - What kind of data do we have?
  - Is school data linked to other systems? Do these systems have common definitions and data standards?
  - Are there any state/local efforts to share the data (e.g. Memoranda of Understanding)? If not, what are the barriers? (Privacy, funding, public will?)
  - Which entity is taking the lead or should take the lead on building the cross-sector data-sharing system?
  - Should there be one data system for all state agencies or a coordinating entity for all existing data systems?
  - Is there ongoing financial support to maintain the data system?
  - How is data being used across systems? Is the system user-friendly to a variety of users?
  - Who can access the data (e.g. students, parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, CBO partners)?
  - Is data being used to design interventions tailored to the individual student's needs?
  - Is the data system sensitive enough to show growth in reaching milestones among students who are significantly academically behind?

- ❒ Identify early warning indicators
  - What information does the data convey about students who are dropping out?
  - What patterns exists among students who drop out?
  - Where are the first signs that a student is becoming off-track?
  - Once students are identified as off-track, what happens next?
    - Is it documented in a system?
    - Who is notified?
    - How will appropriate interventions be determined?
  - Who (schools, partners, etc.) will implement the interventions??
  - How can individual student growth be rewarded?

Building Capacity

A robust system of expanded options for struggling students and out-of-school youth offers all youth a variety of high-quality options connecting them to education and workforce opportunities. Communities can take stock and ask if they have the types of programs needed, if there are enough programs and enough capacity given the disconnected youth population, and whether the programming is of high quality, leading all students to secondary credentials and postsecondary preparedness.

A menu or portfolio of high quality options should include high-quality alternative programs or schools operated by districts and community-based organizations (CBOs); accelerated learning models, such as credits earned based on demonstrated competency instead of seat time; online learning; evening academies; concurrent enrollment in high school and college; GED Plus/Diploma Plus models; career and technical education; postsecondary education and training opportunities; and integrated education, skills training, and work experience programs leading to secondary and/or occupational credentials.[76]

Expanding options for struggling students and out-of-school youth can help communities reevaluate current education offerings and envision new options for *all* students. In this way, building the capacity to meet the needs of students who fall off track to graduation can, in fact, help stakeholders begin an effort to expand options for all students.

While the development of an expanded set of education options for youth takes place primarily at the local level where services are delivered, the state can play a significant role in encouraging this local-level work through grant programs and statewide initiatives to build local capacity. States should consider how they can provide such incentives for the development of a range of high quality options for students.

Offering a menu or portfolio of options by scaling up existing models and offering new approaches

Struggling students and out-of-school youth are a diverse group with a variety of needs, and they require a wide range of options to reconnect with school and get back on track. Young people have trouble in or leave school for many different reasons and have a variety of barriers to success upon returning to school. Strong systems of support offer multiple options, a "menu" or "portfolio" of programs, such as accelerated learning, twilight academies, programs for parenting teens, credit recovery, GED preparation, juvenile

justice reentry programs, employment preparation, and career and technical education, often overseen by a coordinating entity or intermediary. For example, the New York City Department of Education's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) works to significantly increase graduation rates and expand connections to college and career opportunities for overage and undercredited high school students. Since 2005, the office has worked to support the development of new and enhanced schools and programs designed specifically for older students who have fallen behind, are thinking about dropping out, or have already dropped out of high school. The OMPG offers students in New York City 23 Young Adult Borough Centers, 45 Transfer Schools, and 100 full-day and part-time GED programs. The Learning to Work (LTW) Initiative adds work-based wrap-around support services at schools and programs in the Multiple Pathways portfolio.[77] In an effort to continue to meet the needs of a diverse population of students, OMPG introduced two additional models in the fall of 2009, including a Transfer School for English Language Learners and an Accelerated Achievement High School designed to provide overage, underprepared 9th grade students with targeted support to develop the skills and knowledge needed to get on track to earn a high school diploma.

Likewise, Portland Public Schools (PPS) has created a broad array of programs and works closely with community-based organizations (CBOs) and Portland Community College to offer innovative education options to retain and reengage students who fall off track to graduation. In addition to numerous alternative education programs run directly by PPS, the Office of Educational Options contracts with community-based organizations to offer education programs to youth who have left or are at great risk of leaving school. The product of this collaboration is a system offering attractive, learner-focused options for students, with programs and paths to reengage young people located throughout Portland and meet their varied needs. In the 2009-2010 school year, PPS served 468 students through in-district Education Options programs and 2939 students in CBO-run alternative programs.[78] Other cities taking this type of multiple options approach include Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, Newark, Philadelphia, and San Jose.[79, 80]

The Association for High School Innovation (AHSI), a network of youth development organizations with more than 290 sites nationwide committed to creating educational opportunities for young people for whom traditional school settings have not been successful, has engaged intensively with municipal leaders, school districts, community partners, postsecondary institutions, state education agencies, and other community partners in three cities—Indianapolis, Nashville, and Newark—to develop a wide range of high quality pathways to graduation in those communities.[81]

States should consider how they can support communities to scale up successful efforts and implement new program models to create a menu of options. For example, the state of Oregon encourages school districts to offer district-run alternative educational options, as well as to contract with youth service providers who are paid with district funds for each student they enroll. Thus, in Portland, the district passes up to 80% of state education funds to contracted education providers serving youth in more than twenty different education programs and schools run by community-based organizations.[82] Likewise, states can provide funds to communities for the development of new education options. The state of Wisconsin provides Alternative Education Program Grants to support public school districts and consortia of school districts to develop new or expand existing alternative programs and schools. Awards are for five years and typically range from $50,000 to $100,000, with a reduction to 60% and 40% of the full amount for years four and five respectively.[83]

Focusing on the goal of successful transition to postsecondary

As communities and states work to expand education options for struggling students and out-of-school youth, it is important to consider the preparation such options provide. In today's economy, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient preparation for living-wage jobs; narrow occupational skills often become obsolete very rapidly; and lifelong learning is critical to career success. Therefore, high school completion and workforce development programs serving struggling and off-track students increasingly must work to prepare these young people—who might previously never have considered postsecondary

Students at over 70 Learn and Earn Early College high schools currently operating in North Carolina take courses on a college or university campus and earn an associate's degree or two years of postsecondary transfer credit while still in high school.

education—for admission to two-year and four-year colleges and universities, as well as other postsecondary pathways. Stakeholders should strive to strengthen the ability of youth-serving organizations to connect youth onto a path leading to postsecondary attainment and employment. While all programs should prepare young people for subsequent postsecondary success, ideally some will offer students an even more direct bridge to postsecondary education through concurrent and dual-enrollment options.

Twenty-six community colleges in 16 states across the country partner with more than 110 public school districts to offer former dropouts a chance to complete high school and earn significant credits toward an associate's degree through the innovative Gateway to College (GTC) program.[84] GTC programs are achieving positive results in a number of areas. Specifically, GTC students have an average attendance rate of 87%; report a substantial reduction in problems with peers, school administration, and faculty, compared to their experiences in high school; report feeling safer and "more cared for" than they did while enrolled in high school; have passed 78% of nearly 47,000 college courses (with a C or better); pass 80% of their first transfer-level core courses—often surpassing degree-seeking students as a whole; and graduate with a high school diploma and an average of 41 college semester credits, putting them well on their way to earning an associate's degree.

In North Carolina, students at Learn and Earn Early College high schools take all classes on a college or university campus and are guaranteed an associate's degree or two years of university transfer credit while still enrolled in high school. Emphasis is placed on enrollment of students who are first-generation college attendees, who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or who have not experienced academic success in a traditional school setting. There are over 70 Learn and Earn Early College high schools in the state, as well as the Learn and Earn Online (LEO) campus, which allows qualified students at any equipped state high school to take college courses online.[85] Since its inception in the fall of 2007, registrations have doubled to students in 114 school systems participating, with success rates (as defined by a grade of "C" or better needed for transfer) of over 80%. North Carolina high school students have earned approximately 90,000 semester hours of college credit through LEO.[86]

New York's LTW Initiative has also demonstrated success in connecting students to postsecondary education. Since the program's inception in September 2005, over 8,500 students have graduated from LTW schools; about a quarter of the 2007-08 graduates enrolled in postsecondary education during the 2008-09 school year, one-third of whom enrolled in schools offering four-year degrees while the remaining two-thirds enrolled in two-year colleges.[87]

Creating numerous reengagement locations

In addition to providing an expanded range of education options, communities must ensure that struggling students and out-of-school youth are aware of these options and have well-lit reentry points. In fact, it is necessary for there to be active outreach to reengage those students who have fallen off track to graduation; for while a large percentage of out-of-school youth want to reengage in education, many do not know how and where to return to school.[88] Fortunately, some communities and states have developed programs and initiatives to reengage young people and assist them in connecting with high quality education to get back on track.

The Montgomery County, OH, Fast Forward Center makes it easy for Dayton-area youth aged 16-21 who have previously dropped out of, or are not regularly attending, high school to reengage with school.[89] By calling 512-FAST, a young person can make an appointment to come to the Center, where they receive

Montgomery County, OH's Fast Forward Center serves as a central location for out-of-school youth to reengage with education.

math and reading assessments and are presented with school options. Once a student chooses the school they would like to attend, the Fast Forward Center refers the student, sending along their contact and assessment information. In the 2007-08 school year the Fast Forward Center served over 4,500 out-of-school youth, 2401 of whom went on to earn a high school credential.

Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) has outreach specialists in the Denver, Aurora, and Boulder Valley School districts who locate high school dropouts and help them return to school.[90] Each year, CYC Educational Outreach Specialists contact nearly 1000 out-of-school youth and help many reenroll in high school educational programs. Outreach workers get referrals directly from lists of dropouts generated by the school districts, community organizations, schools personnel, parents, and youth themselves. Outreach specialists build a positive, encouraging relationship with out-of-school youth, assessing their motivation to return to school, working to eliminate barriers to restart their education, and helping youth to find an appropriate fit for a school.

The Baltimore Public Schools organizes "Great Kids Come Back Fairs," offering out-of-school youth under the age of 21 the opportunity to learn about the varied programs available in Baltimore to help them obtain their high school diploma. Similarly, in Portland, OR, the Coalition of Metro Area Community Schools, comprised of numerous alternative educational programs that serve students from middle school to high school age, has organized "Come Back Fairs" showcasing the many alternative educational options available to young people who have left school. At these "come back" events, which may feature raffle prizes, live music, and food, participants are invited to get information, ask questions, and even sign up to get back in school.

Assessing program quality and ensuring attention to quality standards in programming

Some of the most promising and effective practices for reengaging young people are taking place in non-traditional, often community-based, settings offering programs designed to assist struggling students and youth who have fallen off track to high school graduation. These educational programs share a commitment to young people's success through innovative, rigorous programming designed to help students obtain education credentials. However, lack of agreed-upon standards for youth program quality or a cohesive network among those serving disconnected youth leaves the field open to substandard programming for our nation's most vulnerable youth. While there is a great need to expand programming for struggling students and out-of-school youth to scale, attempts to do so should not come at the expense of program quality.

There are a number of resources available to assist programs, schools, and systems interested in quality assessment and improvement. The Forum for Youth Investment has created a helpful guide that compares the purpose, structure, and content of a number youth program quality assessment tools.[91] The National Youth Employment Coalition's PEPNet (Promising and Effective Practices Network) and EDNet (Education Development Network) tools identify and establish criteria for effective practice in youth programs and alternative education, respectively, and offer self-assessment tools designed to help programs gather information and improve program quality.[92, 93] Such standards can help communities and states identify and encourage quality practices and programs. For example, in an effort to build quality standards into expectations of youth programs within their cities, public agencies in San Francisco, CA and Washington, DC have incorporated elements of the PEPNet Standards in their Requests for Proposals for youth programming.

Agreed-upon quality standards can also help in program assessment and improvement processes. In 2009, Philadelphia's five E[3] Power Centers, funded by the Philadelphia Youth Network, a local intermediary, embarked upon and completed the NYEC PEPNet Quality Self Assessment (QSA) and continuous improvement process. All five E[3] Power Centers, which offer education and workplace skill-building for formerly out-of-school youth, participated in the self-assessment process and undertook the Web-based QSA to assess how well they meet the research- and practice-based PEPNet Quality Standards for Youth Programs. Multiple stakeholders from each of the five Centers—70 in total— completed the QSA. For each Center, after all stakeholders completed the QSA, the online tool aggregated the Center's assessment data and provided each program with an organization-wide report. Centers then engaged in their own debriefing meetings to identify areas of strength and potential areas for growth. From these debriefing meetings, each of the five the E[3] Power Centers were able to embark on an improvement action planning process, selecting areas for growth on which to focus improvement efforts. In addition, all of the Centers' QSA results were compiled into an aggregate, system-wide assessment for PYN to guide continuous improvement and technical assistance efforts with participating Centers.

Ensuring professional development opportunities for youth service professionals

An effective youth reengagement system needs well-trained staff that possesses the information and skills necessary to work with a struggling student and disconnected youth population. Educators working within public school districts have generally gone through a teacher credentialing program and are regularly afforded professional development opportunities; however, these opportunities are rarely focused on this particular population of young people. Those educators and youth service professionals operating outside of public school districts (e.g., in charter schools or other CBO-run schools and youth programs) generally have many fewer organized opportunities for professional development. In fact, some educators and youth service professionals may not have completed any credentialing program for working with youth. Yet research has shown that systematic, high-quality professional development of staff can lead to increased practitioner satisfaction, retention, and skills. This, in turn, can lead to improved practice, which leads to improved outcomes for youth. In short, professional development of staff means better practice, improved program quality, and increased positive youth outcomes.[94]

The San Diego Workforce Partnership conducted an assessment of the professional development needs of youth service professionals across their provider network in order to tailor training to specific needs of the network.

Communities and youth-serving systems can find it productive to provide professional development opportunities across many organizations. The San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP), which works to foster economic growth and prosperity in San Diego through education, training, and lifelong learning, worked with the National Youth Employment Coalition to provide professional development assessment and training to all of the youth service providers receiving Partnership funds. The assessment content and training foundation were based on the national Youth Service Professionals Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (YSP/KSA) Initiative implemented by the National Collaborative onWorkforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y) supported by the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and led by NYEC. In the assessment phase of the initiative, youth workers individually rated their knowledge, skills and abilities across a core set of baseline competencies. These competencies reflected the fields of youth development and workforce development and reflected additional competencies to support youth with disabilities, a population served by youth workers throughout various systems. These ratings were compiled and analyzed across the SDWP youth provider network. The results of the assessment were used to provide information about the professional development needs of the youth provider network, and were used to tailor and deliver professional development training specific to the needs of the network. In addition, the process helped providers identify areas of strength and expertise that

could be shared across the network. For example, several agencies identified a need to improve efforts to serve gang-affiliated youth. Another participating agency serves primarily gang-affiliated youth and will be able to serve as a resource to other agencies as they strive to increase their competency in serving this specific youth population.

BUILDING CAPACITY

As you work with stakeholders in your community and state to address issues of building capacity, consider the following questions:

- ❒ Offer a menu of multiple options by scaling up existing models and approaches and offering new ones
  - What approaches and models currently exist in our community?
  - How many spaces exist in our current programming?
  - How many additional spaces do we need?
  - What information and resources do we need to scale up our programming for struggling students and out-of-school youth?
  - What new types of programs do we need/want?
  - How are existing and proposed programs aligned with the population's needs?
  - Is the public aware of the programming available?
  - Are there dropout centers/central referral offices?
  - Does state policy support the development of a variety of education options for struggling students and out-of-school youth?

- ❒ Focus on goal of successful transition to postsecondary
  - Is transition to postsecondary a focus of reengagement strategies?
  - How are links created to postsecondary options for struggling students and students who have fallen off-track to graduation?
  - Are there dropout reengagement programs that offer dual-enrollment or college bridge programming?
  - Are there dropout reengagement programs that include coursework toward industry recognized credentials?

- ❒ Create numerous reengagement locations
  - What strategies are in place to identify students who have fallen off track to graduation?
  - Do schools and districts share information with other youth-serving organizations and agencies about struggling students and young people who have dropped out of school?
  - What strategies are in place to actively reengage students who have dropped out of school?
  - How are avenues for reengagement advertised publicly?
  - Are there specific locations where young people can go to find out about reentry programs?

- ❒ Assess program quality and ensuring an adherence to quality standards in programming
  - Are programs serving struggling students and out-of-school youth held to high standards?
  - How could the quality of programming for this population be improved?
  - How could the community or state ensure program quality by requiring adherence to certain standards for youth programming (e.g., in RFP processes)?
  - Are there common areas in need of improvement evident across schools and programs in the community or state?

- ❒ Ensure professional development opportunities for youth service professionals
  - What professional development opportunities for educators and youth service professionals (YSPs) exist and are educators and YSPs knowledgeable about the options available for struggling students and out-of-school youth?
  - Are educators and YSPs working in community-based organization reengagement programs provided with professional development opportunities like those offered by LEAs?
  - Are there opportunities for educators and YSPs in reengagement programs to meet and share effective practices?
  - Are there coaching or mentoring opportunities for educators and YSPs in community-based organization reengagement programs?
  - Are there opportunities for educators and YSPs to visit successful reengagement programs in other communities or states?

Funding

Funding is a persistent issue with regard to education initiatives, particularly for those serving disadvantaged student groups. Often it costs more to provide effective programming and strategies to educate the hardest-to-serve students, and this can make it more of a challenge to secure adequate financial support as well as making non-traditional and more costly models easy targets when states and districts need to "tighten their belts." However, investment in effective practices to support struggling students and reconnect returning dropouts can ultimately reap even greater returns down the road to students, schools, and communities. In addition, there are ways that states and districts can maximize available funds through increased flexibility in how funds are used and creative blending of multiple streams of funding.

Ensuring adequacy of funding

Educating youth who may be significantly behind academically and/or face other formidable barriers to school success often requires additional resources beyond what is typically offered in a traditional public school setting. For example, homeless students have additional transportation needs, highly mobile students may need supplemental tutoring services to overcome gaps in their education, impoverished students who must work to help support a family may need to attend school in the evening or on weekends, and parenting students may need on-site child care available in order to attend school. In these cases, additional funds may be needed to help ensure such disadvantages do not prohibit motivated students from participating in educational opportunities. A first step in ensuring there is adequate funding to cover the cost of educating disadvantaged and disconnected youth is to determine what kind of additional supports are needed to serve students in a local community and how much those supports cost. Calculating the amount of additional funds needed to support students at risk of not graduating can provide leverage for funding being designated to provide those additional supports. Several states employ categorical funding streams to help support disadvantaged students, some using a weighted student funding formula, and others providing additional per pupil dollars for students attending an alternative school.

Wisconsin's "Children at risk of not graduating from high school" statute is a categorical aid program that allows districts to receive additional state aid in an amount equal to 10% of the district's average per pupil amount for each enrolled student in grades 5 to 12 who meets the criteria for being at risk of not graduating from high school.[95] The statute also outlines funding mechanisms for districts to contract with private, nonprofit, nonsectarian agencies to provide education services for students and to pay each contracting agency an amount equal to at least 80% of the per pupil costs for the school district.[96] Georgia has implemented a statewide graduation coach program to identify and provide early intervention services to students at risk of dropping out of school.[97] State funds support a full-time graduation coach in each middle school in the state and in each Georgia high school with a graduation rate below 95%.

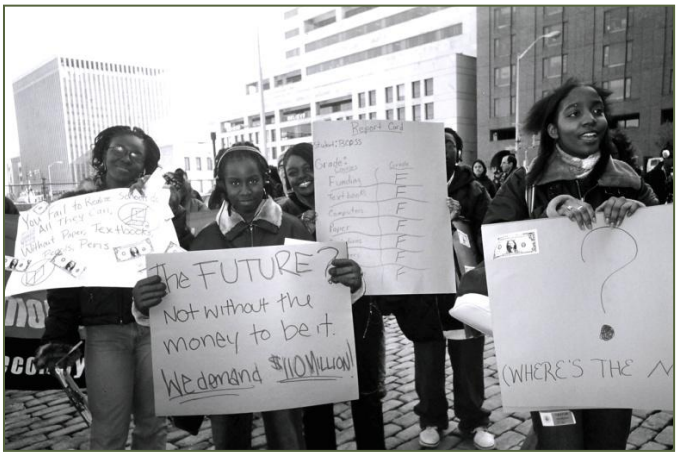
North Carolina is one of many states where a lawsuit against the state for not providing sufficient funds to provide a sound education resulted in additional funding being allocated to educating those students

North Carolina directs funding for support students in a variety of categories including At-Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools, Limited English Proficiency, Low Wealth County, Small County, Children with Disabilities, and Career and Technical Education.

who are defined as disadvantaged.[98] North Carolina utilizes a number of categorical funding allotments based on various criteria (e.g., headcount, student performance, population demographics) that can be used to support students at risk of not graduating. Among these is the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund to support districts in educating students from low-income families, students living in single-parent homes, or students with at least one parent who has not earned a high school diploma. Other categorical allotments include At-Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools, Limited English Proficiency, Low Wealth County, Small County, Children with Disabilities, and Career and Technical Education.

Unfortunately, non-traditional schools educating hard-to-serve youth do not always receive additional funds beyond the standard per-pupil amount, despite the fact that it costs more to deliver these education options. One solution is for states to create specific funding streams to support student attending alternative schools or programs. Indiana's Alternative Education Program Grants provide extra per-pupil funds for district-run alternative programs and schools.[99] Massachusetts also established an Alternative Education Grant Program to provide funding for alternative schools or programs operated by a district and/or charters. Likewise, Wisconsin provides Alternative Education Program Grants to support public school districts and consortia of school districts to develop new or expand existing alternative programs and schools.[100] Grant programs like these are often subject to appropriations, which means that sometimes the grants given each year are significantly less than what was outlined in the authorizing legislation. For this reason, it is important not only to establish funding streams for education options, but also to advocate for continued appropriations at the authorized level.

It can be argued that students off track to graduate and reenrolled dropouts are a category of students that merit additional funding resources, much like those receiving services for special education or English language learners. However, in recent years, the emphasis on schools and districts need to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) has actually created unintentional disincentives to serving dropouts returning to earn a diploma and students who are significantly behind academically. To compensate for this, states and districts can create additional financial incentives for reengaging former dropouts and educating students who are off track to graduate by providing additional per pupil funds for each student (re)enrolled in a pathway to graduation. Texas' Dropout Recovery Pilot Program identifies and recruits students aged 25 and under who have dropped out of public secondary schools and reconnects them to educational programs that will help them earn a diploma and/or become college ready.[101] This initiative provides per-student funding for the duration of the program and includes a "pay for performance" grant for programs to use for dropout recovery activities beyond the program year. Illinois' Hope and Opportunity Pathways through Education (HOPE) program provides incentive grants to regional offices of education and to school districts to develop partnerships with community colleges and community groups to build comprehensive plans to reenroll high school dropouts up to age 21 in programs that will enable them to earn a high school diploma.[102]



"Student Protest" by Unique, 12th grade, Baltimore Youth Congress, Baltimore, MD

Indiana, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin have established grant programs to provide additional funding beyond the standard per-pupil amount for alternative education programs.

Quite a few states have created dropout prevention initiatives and grant programs, including Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. Colorado leveraged State Fiscal Stabilization Funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 to create the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Reengagement within the Department of Education.[103] This office manages several initiatives and grant programs related to dropout prevention, including the Expelled and At-Risk Student Services Grant program to provide education for students who have been expelled and prevent suspensions and expulsions.

Facilitating flow of education funds to effective providers

Not every school is designed to meet the diverse needs of all students. Many schools outside of the traditional K-12 system, such as charters and schools run by community-based organizations (CBOs), have been successful in meeting the needs of some students in ways that traditional schools have not. For example, some schools are more specialized, operating as "twilight" schools during the afternoon and evening or providing childcare for parenting students. In some communities, CBOs have begun providing alternative education options to meet the needs of young people whose needs are not being met in a traditional high school setting. Such CBO-run schools or programs complement the traditional education system and states should create funding mechanisms that facilitate the flow of public dollars to CBOs that have demonstrated effectiveness in graduating students who have not been successful in traditional public school settings. Oregon has education finance mechanisms in place that encourage school districts to contract with qualified providers and facilitate the flow of district funding for each student enrolled to those non-district providers. For example, the Portland Public School district passes up to 80% of state education funds to contracted education providers serving youth in twenty different education options run by community-based organizations.[104] Similarly, Wisconsin's "Children at risk of not graduating from high school" statute also outlines funding mechanisms for districts to contract with private, nonprofit, nonsectarian agencies to provide education services for students and pay each contracting agency an amount equal to at least 80% of the per-pupil costs for the school district.[105]

New charter schools and community-based education programs and schools often experience a delay of up to a year in receiving state education funds, which are based on the previous year's enrollment, forcing them to "float" the cost of the start-up year. Policymakers should consider ways to mitigate the financial strain this delay can cause on non-traditional education options. Indiana accomplishes this by allowing new charter schools to receive state funds based on their September Average Daily Membership count, with state funding provided monthly beginning in January of the charter's first year.[106] Georgia provides state-funded charter planning grants of $8,000 for use prior to the time a charter is approved.[107]

Blending sources of funding

Non-traditional academic programs often have more flexibility to be funded in non-traditional ways than traditional schools. That is, because non-traditional options incorporate a range of services based on the needs of their student population, they may be in a better position to be eligible for Workforce Investment Act fund (for services such as career guidance, occupational skills development, and other workforce preparation), state health and human services dollars (for child care, substance counseling, housing assistance), private grants, etc. One benefit of CBOs running alternative programs is their ability to tap into other funding sources to provide "wrap-around" services for students. While CBOs and charter schools may be able to pursue some funding that is less accessible for public schools, all alternative education models should consider how they might be able to harness funds beyond local and state per pupil amounts. Aside from local, state, and private grants,

Oregon and Wisconsin both have funding mechanisms that ease the flow of state dollars to non-district education providers.

non-traditional schools may be eligible for a variety of federal funding streams through the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Stakeholders may want to consider how intermediary organizations can facilitate the blending of funds from a variety of resources to support youth in meeting education goals. In their role as conveners of multiple partners, including funders, service providers, employers, and other stakeholders, intermediaries can harness and manage multiple funding streams.

OPPortunity High School in Hartford, CT is a year-round, small, academically rigorous diploma-granting high school for overage and undercredited youth that is operated through a partnership between Hartford Public Schools (HPS) and Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), a local youth service agency. The school is financed by HPS per pupil funds, Title I money harnessed to provide an additional "recuperative weight" for serving this population, workforce investment board funds for student internships, funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, as well as philanthropy dollars raised by OPP.

Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSCs) are school-based centers throughout the state, bolstered by community partnerships, which help students at risk of school failure by addressing non-cognitive barriers to school success.[108] FRYCs are financed by state general fund revenues, but the vast majority of FRYSCs bring in other sources of funding to support the work, including community foundation and private grants, community fundraisers, and federal 21st Century Community Learning Center grants.

OPPortunity High School in Hartford, CT is supported by per pupil funds from Hartford Public Schools, Title I money harnessed to provide an additional "recuperative weight" for serving overage and undercredited students, workforce investment board funds for student internships, funding from the U.S. Dept. of Labor, as well as philanthropy dollars raised by Our Piece of the Pie youth service agency.

Ensuring funds for older students

One way for states and districts to increase the number of young people graduating from high school is to provide education funding for enrolled students beyond age 18. Some states provide per pupil funding up to age 21, while others fund students to age 26 or do not have an explicit age limit. New York City Public Schools, for example, uses per-pupil funds to operate multiple Young Adult Borough Centers for students between the ages of 17½ and 21 to earn a high school diploma. Massachusetts allows each local district to determine the maximum age for students to enroll in a public school, enabling districts to enroll older students if they so choose, and draw down state education funds for those students.[109] Extending the funding eligibility age gives secondary schools an incentive to continue working with students who may need longer than four years to graduate. This kind of funding policy, coupled with districts reporting five- and six-year graduation rates for state accountability purposes, can go a long way toward increasing high school graduation rates.

FUNDING

As you work with stakeholders in your community and state to address issues of funding, consider the following questions:

- ❒ Ensure adequacy of funding
  - What are the real costs?
  - Is state/local education funding increasing or decreasing?
  - Are there dedicated funds for serving students at risk of dropping out or dropout recovery?
  - If state funds are subject to appropriation, are there efforts to ensure the funding for dropout prevention and recovery will not be reduced?
  - Do alternative schools and programs receive additional per-pupil funding?
  - Can education finance lawsuits providing leverage?
  - Are there existing incentives for providing dropout prevention and recovery services? Is there categorical per-pupil funding available for off-track students and/or returning dropouts?
  - What information have we gathered to make the case for investment in dropout prevention and recovery?
  - Do other states have dropout prevention and recovery incentives that could be adapted to our system?

- ❒ Facilitate the flow of education funds to effective providers
  - Is there currently legislation that prohibits or encourages the flow of education funds to external providers?
  - What are the existing policies for approval to direct funds to external providers?
  - What other states have legislative language encouraging the flow of education funds to effective external providers?
  - Should legislation be modified related to the reimbursement timeframe for charter schools?

- ❒ Blend sources of funding
  - What resources for youth are available in the community/state?
  - How is our school or district using the following federal sources of funding?
    - U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
      - Title I: Youth Activities
      - Title II: Adult & Family Literacy Act
    - U.S. Department of Education
      - Carl D. Perkins Career & Technical Education
      - The Even Start Family Literacy Program – Title I, Part B, Subpart 3 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)
    - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Temporary Assistance to Needy Families
  - Which federal and state funding streams or grant programs are we eligible for?
  - How might we combine efforts with other state- and federally-funded programs as well non-profits to maximize resources?
  - Are there opportunities to integrate various funding streams?

- ❒ Ensure funds for older students (i.e., age 18 and up)
  - What does state legislation say about this?
  - Should the state legislation be modified to more strongly encourage the provision of education funds for older students?

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